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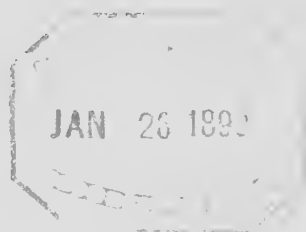


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UPON THE

IV INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF ARCHITECTS,

BRUSSELS, 1897,

SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY,

BY

GEORGE OAKLEY TOTTEN, JR.,

OFFICIAL DELEGATE OF THE UNITED STATES.



WASHINGTON:

GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE.

1898.

TREASURY DEPARTMENT,
Document No. 2057.
Supervising Architect.

REPORT
UPON THE
IV INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF ARCHITECTS.
BRUSSELS, 1897.

The Honorable the SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY.

SIR: In addition to my verbal reports of the IV International Congress of Architects, made upon my return to the Hon. F. A. Vanderlip, I have the honor to submit the following, together with the official report of the Congress, which I have just received.

In accordance with your instructions contained in letter of June 24, 1897, I sailed on August 11 for Brussels. Arriving a few days before the opening of the Congress, I had the opportunity of meeting a number of Belgian architects, and of paying my respects to our minister, the Hon. Bellamy Storer. Mr. Storer kindly placed his secretary, Mr. Snyers, at my disposal, and I am greatly indebted to both these gentlemen for their valuable assistance.

Before the opening of the Congress I presented to the "Société Centrale d'Architecture de Belgique" the collection of photographs of public buildings which you intrusted to my care, together with a letter, of which the following is a translation:

TREASURY DEPARTMENT,
Brussels, August 27, 1897.

M. DUMORTIER,

President Société Centrale d'Architecture de Belgique.

Before leaving the United States the Honorable L. J. Gage, Secretary of the Treasury, kindly confided to me the mission of offering in his name to the Société Centrale d'Architecture de Belgique a collection of photographs of the principal public buildings of Washington.

I have the honor, Mr. President, to send you these photographs, which, I hope, will be received with favor by the members of your society.

In confiding this mission to me Mr. Gage requested me to convey his best wishes for the success of the Congress organized by your society.

I take this occasion, Mr. President, to present to you my highest consideration.

G. O. TOTTEN, Jr.,
Chief Designer, Office Supervising Architect.

In acknowledgment I received the following reply:

Sir and Honored Confrère:

You have kindly presented us, upon the occasion of the IV International Congress of Architects, organized by our society, a collection of photographs, which we accept

as a kind and valuable souvenir. Your delicate attention testifies the sincere sentiments of confraternity which bind us together.

We thank you sincerely and pray you to accept, sir and honored confrère, the expression of our highest esteem.

For the society,

VALÈRE DUMORTIER, *President.*

F. SYMONS, *Secretary Adjunct.*

To Mr. G. O. TOTTEN, Jr.,

Chief Designer, Office of the Supervising Architect.

Universal admiration was expressed for the photographs, and Mr. Dumortier, president of the Congress, as well as of the society, referred to them on several occasions.

I was invited to and attended, on Friday evening, August 27, a special meeting of the Société Centrale d'Architecture. On Saturday evening the society gave an informal reception to all the members of the Congress at their quarters in the Palais de la Bourse.

The Retrospective Exhibition of Architecture was opened at the International Exposition on Sunday morning. Here I was presented, with the official delegates from other countries, to M. De Bruyn, minister of public works and fine arts. The Architectural Exhibition was not only a retrospective one of the architecture of Belgium, but also of contemporaneous works of other countries. It was quite general in its nature, and included the decorative arts.

One gallery was devoted entirely to a retrospective exhibit of the architecture of Belgium, and this was extremely instructive. It included photographs, as well as original and measured drawings of many of the historical buildings of this delightful country. One room was filled with students' work, while another was devoted to France, and still another to foreign countries in general.

No American architecture, either of a public or private nature, was represented. This is much to be regretted, especially in view of the fact that so little is known in Europe of the progress we are making in architecture.

I would respectfully suggest, as a duty we owe to other countries in this great problem of architectural development, that a large and complete exhibition of our public buildings be sent to the next International Congress, to be held in Paris in 1900.

The formal opening of the Congress took place Sunday afternoon, August 29, in the Salle de Science of the Palais des Académies. This was presided over by His Majesty Leopold II, King of the Belgians, assisted by M. De Bruyn, minister of public works and fine arts, and M. Bols, burgomaster of Brussels.

The Government delegates from the various countries were elected vice-presidents of the Congress. They were: Mr. J. M. Poupinel, France; Count Paul de Suzor, Russia; Mr. P. J. Cuypers, Holland; Prof. G. Aitchison, England; Prof. A. Betocchi, Italy; Prof. Otto Wagner, Austria; Mr. Pedro d'Avila, Portugal; Mr. J. Stübgen, Germany; Mr. G. O. Totten, jr., United States of America, and delegates from the leading architectural societies of the world.

The vice-presidents were presented to His Majesty, who had a gracious word to say to each in his own language. He expressed the keen interest he felt in our country and his great admiration for our works of architecture.

The Congress, thus formally opened, proceeded directly to the discussion of the subjects in hand. These were continued during every morning of the session.

I shall not enter upon the details of the proceedings, as they are fully given in the accompanying official report.

Monday afternoon the members of the Congress visited, in a body, the principal buildings of architectural interest in the city.

The confraternal banquet took place in the evening, in the Salle de l'Harmonie. During the dinner a toast was drunk to the health of all the sovereigns of Europe and the President of the United States. Many other toasts followed, and, as an official delegate, I was called upon. The following is a translation of a part of my reply:

I desire to express the gratitude of my Government for the invitation to participate in this remarkable Congress, which will mark a memorable date in the history of the art of architecture. You are not ignorant, gentlemen, of the fact that our country is still in that early period of its development through which all new countries must of necessity pass. We have no indigenous architecture; but an abundance of the finest materials, a rich population, and the desire for the grand and the beautiful have stimulated the ardor of our architects, and it is at your doors, here, in old Europe, where the art of which we are the students has such a noble history, that we come to look for inspiration. It is in studying your creations that we count on arriving at the grand and beautiful—that we count on attaining the ideal.

Tuesday afternoon the delegates were taken by special train to inspect the ruined abbey at Villers, M. Chs. Licot conducting the party and explaining the peculiarities of the work as executed at different periods.

Wednesday was spent in Antwerp inspecting the buildings and monuments of architectural interest. The discussions on this day were conducted in the beautiful and richly decorated old gothic council chamber (Salla Communale) of the Hotel de Ville. In the evening the members of the Congress enjoyed a ball given in their honor by M. Buls, in the Hotel de Ville, in Brussels. We had previously studied this building by daylight, but now an opportunity was afforded us of seeing by myriads of well-arranged electric lights its beautiful historic tapestries and quaint Flemish carvings.

Thursday morning the discussions were continued. The afternoon was spent at the Colonial Exposition at Tervueren, inspecting the interesting exhibitions from the Kongo, Belgium's great colonial possession.

Before the close of the Congress I read a paper, of which the following is a translation:

Our President has kindly allowed me this opportunity to bring before you a subject which in the United States is one of much controversy and of great public interest. I wish to speak of Government architecture; that is to say, buildings erected for the use of the Federal Government.

The subject is a vast one, and one upon which a great deal could be said—much more than is possible in the few moments at my disposal. Hence, I shall be careful not to enter into a detailed discussion.

By Government architecture one understands in America the construction of such buildings as post-offices, custom-houses, mints, court-houses, etc. Our earliest public buildings, the Capitol, and the White House, the residence of the President of the United States, were constructed by private architects, and it was not until about 1850 that it was decided to organize a central bureau, attached to the Treasury Department, which was charged with the preparation of plans of all Federal buildings.

At this time architecture was but little appreciated among us, and the work executed in this Bureau was at first more the work of the engineer than of the architect. Since then the progress realized has been very great, and I would like to show you, in a mere outline, the workings of this Bureau, hoping that it may be of some interest to you.

After our Congress has made the necessary appropriation for the erection of a public building, the Bureau chooses the site and investigates its requirements, makes the design, prepares the working drawings, and superintends the work.

As a working organization this Bureau is truly remarkable. It is divided into eight divisions, comprising in all about 150 employees, all under the direction of an architect. Too often, unfortunately, this architect owes his appointment to political influences; but were he really a genius, the administration alone of the Bureau is so enormous he has but little time at his disposal to study the problems in design. I am glad to say, however, it is generally admitted that the work executed under the direction of the last Supervising Architect was quite remarkable; still, the sentiment of our architects is that the system is bad and that our Government architecture is inferior to that executed by our private architects.

It is the desire of Mr. Gage, our present Secretary of the Treasury, to reform the system, that Government architecture may serve as a model, as an inspiration to architects.

With this point in view there seems to be but three general systems to arrive at the desired result:

First. To confide the entire work to a general bureau, under the direction of an architect, such as the office of the Supervising Architect.

Second. To have the work directly executed by a private architect. This method has the advantage of assuring a more careful study of the problems and the personal supervision of the architect during their execution. It presents, nevertheless, the danger of opening the field to favoritism, and he who would receive the work might not be the best architect, but the one with the greatest influence.

Third. To award the work in a public or private competition. This method promises the best results, and Secretary Gage proposes to try it immediately.

We are in the infancy of art and desirous of profiting by the experience of the official delegates and the other members present. We shall be greatly obliged if they will explain briefly the methods employed by their respective Governments, and give us their personal opinion as to the best system to adopt in order to arrive at the best results.

I am not authorized by my Government to introduce this subject in the deliberations of the Congress. I do it simply as an American, as an architect who has searched for the most efficacious means of affording an opportunity to the talent which he knows exists among the colleagues of his native land, so that some day they may create monuments as grand as those which the genius of their elder European brothers have given to the admiration of the world.

The subject was referred to a special commission composed of the following members: Messrs. Aitchison, England; Betocchi, Italy; Battigny, France; Cuypers, Holland; Oleson, Sweden; de Suzor, Russia;

Hickeldeyn and Stübben, Germany; and Wagner, Austria, which rendered the following decision:

It is desirable that the construction of public buildings shall be confided to private architects chosen by public or private competition or otherwise, and that the architects superintend the erection of the works, but under the direction of the Government.

After the commission rendered the above decision, I requested each member to kindly give me his personal views on the subject.

The following letters are their replies:

[Translation.]

COLOGNE, November 2, 1897.

DEAR SIR: I regret not to have received the first copy of your paper upon "Methods for obtaining plans for Government buildings," or I would have answered you at once.

In Germany both the States and large cities have several Government architectural offices of a higher or lower grade.

All ordinary architectural problems are designed and the buildings constructed by said offices.

Designs of monumental buildings for the general and municipal governments are obtained by public competition.

In cases of particular importance (as, for instance, the Reichstag House, in Berlin), international competitions are held. In this case the competitors are invited.

The winner of such competitions has general supervision of the building during its erection, to see that it is carried out according to his ideas; but the several Government architects superintend the construction of the building and keep the accounts.

This method was employed in the case of the Reichstag building, in Berlin, and the railroad depots of Cologne, Frankfort, and Strassburg.*

Some of the departments, for instance the post-office department, have sometimes engaged private architects to furnish designs and take charge of the construction of the buildings, but this is an exception.

To my knowledge limited competitions have proven to be a success.

Very truly, yours,

MR. G. O. TOTTEN, JR.,

Chief Designer, Office Supervising Architect.

J. STÜBBEN,
Imperial Architect.

VIENNA, October 1, 1897.

DEAR SIR: In possession of your honored letter, in which you ask me to answer the two questions which you have put to the Congress of Architects in Brussels, I will try to describe the system which is used in Austria for getting plans for public buildings.

The method which our Government uses is not always the same. For exceptional great and monumental buildings a general, sometimes even an international, competition is published. In other cases, for buildings of smaller importance, the Government commissions very often directly a private architect, but the results thereof were not always advantageous from an artistic point of view, and that may have been the cause that the Government tried a third way when the construction of a metropolitan railway was decided. All the stations and depots were to have an architectural exterior, and in order to find the right architect for this sort of work

* The railroads and stations in Germany are owned by the Government.—G. O. T.

the Government asked the Association of Artists in Vienna to nominate an architect. I may call your attention to the fact that the nomination was unanimously made.

Therefore, all our great public buildings are constructed by private architects.

At the same time our Government has an architectural department whose head officer is one of the best Viennese architects, but his work is more of an administrative sort. This office has to supervise and control the construction of all public buildings, but the artistic initiative is very little. A Government official has never the authority and liberty of a private man, and, so far as art is concerned, freedom is of first necessity.

My private opinion is, of course, against the institution of a Government architect. Such a department is necessarily only for the sake of control, but never for the advance of art. The head of that department must therefore be more a good, sharp, and honest administrator than a great artist.

The other way, namely, to commission directly a private architect, would rarely work well. Politics would interfere too much. The best way will always be a public competition with a good jury. At least two-thirds of the jurors should be architects.

A government has the duty to foster the talents, and that can only be done if its influence is exercised in a true artistic direction. Your Treasurer seems to have the best intention, and I can only wish that he may succeed for the sake of art and your country.

I am, dear sir, sincerely yours,

OTTO WAGNER,

Royal Imperial Architect, Professor Academy of Fine Arts.

MR. G. O. TOTTEN, JR.

[Translation.]

ROME, October 14, 1897.

The public works (including the construction of such structures or buildings erected at the expense of the Government) are regulated by the law on public works, dated March 20, 1865, No. 2248.

Title I of this law treats of the power of the ministry of public works, relating to public monumental works. Article I speaks of the duties attributed to the ministry on public works.

* * * * *

(h) The preservation of public art monuments.

(i) The construction, the amplification, the improvements, the maintenance of public structures, except those belonging to the war and navy departments and those which, though belonging to the State, are not for public use.

* * * * *

And further it is stated in Article V:

"ARTICLE V. The right for the proposals and programmes relating to the maintenance, amplification, improvements, and new constructions of administration buildings for the other ministries, is reserved to the same, also the right to make the payments for the relative expenses; but to the ministry of public works is attributed the duty of the compilation of such art projects, the supervision and technical execution, the responsibility, and the care of such works."

"In case another ministry desires to have a new building made by engineers or architects delegated by them, such a structure will be subjected to a technical examination and appropriation of the ministry of public works, which latter will have the superintendence of its execution and its care.

"The duty of the ministry of public works does not extend to small repairs of daily occurrence in the different offices of such buildings.

"ARTICLE 6. Concerning those private buildings loaned to the Government for public use, those donated, or of a public nature, the ministry of public works is instructed to look after their safety and the public sanitation."

Such are the rules of the law, the complete explanation of which articles is as follows:

First. The ministry of public works, through their employees who constitute the "Royal Corps of Civil Engineers" (and all such employees who are engineers, and at the same time architects), have to provide for:

(a) All the works pertaining to the preservation of public monuments of art.

(b) All work pertaining to the construction of any new public building to be erected, the amplification, improvement, and maintenance of all public buildings already built.

Second. With the exception of those buildings belonging to the ministry of war and navy, which are to be constructed and maintained by the officials of the military corps of engineers.

Third. If a public building is to be constructed for another ministry than for that of public works, said ministry has to propose it, prepare the programme, stipulate the contract, and pay the expenses. But the right is reserved for the ministry of public works (i. e., their civil corps of engineers) to prepare the project, direct the technical execution, the accountability, and the care of such works.

Fourth. Except when a ministry would prefer to carry out a project made by an engineer or architect selected by same ministry. But also in such a case remains the duty of the ministry of public works:

(a) The approval of such a project, which is subject to an examination and opinion of the supreme council of the public works.

(b) The superintendence of the execution of the work, and the final care with which the officials of the civil corps of engineers are instructed by the ministry of public works.

Fifth. Each ministry is at liberty to look out for small current repairing work for the common maintenance for such buildings, either occupied by them or dependent upon such ministry.

Sixth. Finally, concerning such buildings or establishments which, though for public use, are not public property, but are private or social property, or for a moral purpose; in this case, the authority of the ministry of public works extends only as far as the safety and the hygiene of the public is concerned. This authority the ministry of public works does not exercise on his own responsibility, except when requested to do so by another ministry in charge of such works.

These regulations are strictly observed, especially for such buildings, exclusive of those belonging to the ministry of public works, the construction, enlargement, or modification of which is constantly executed on projects and under the direction of the officials of the civil corps of engineers.

But, gradually, that which according to a strict enforcement of the law should be an exception, became for the other ministries a matter of habitual practice.

Every ministry had in the beginning some engineer or architect who had charge of repair works for the maintenance of buildings. Gradually the number of such employees has been increased, and they have been intrusted with the extensions, modifications, and large repairing works; finally, almost every ministry has formed a technical force of its own for the construction of new structures of any great importance.

For instance, the ministry of interior has now a technical force of engineers and architects which not only provides for the maintenance of prisons, but also for the enlargement, substantial modification, and construction of new penitentiaries.

The ministry of public instruction has instituted technical royal offices for the repairs and maintenance of national monuments.

The ministry of justice (attorney-general) has a technical force of its own which provides for everything that may be needed in buildings of a religious nature in its charge.

The ministry of finance has also established technical royal offices in all the provinces of the State for all buildings assigned to custom-house uses, and also for all buildings and offices for the treasuries, etc.

But even under such existing conditions of affairs (which departs from the strict execution of the law), it is a fact that all these engineers or architects are Government employees, so that all public works are executed at the expense of the State, and the projects made under the direction of Government officials.

With the exception that the present system has increased the number of offices, the force, and the expenses, there is no fault to be found with it, as the work is more perfect, and there is no doubt that officials continually and exclusively employed upon work of the same nature produce better results than would be obtained by employing architects familiar only with work of an entirely different character.

At any rate, the technical force in Italy, employed either at the ministry of public works or at any other ministry, is only appointed by competitive examination, besides every promotion to the highest grade depending on the ability and merit of the officials, excluding in this way any danger of favoritism; and with a force of such a character, famous works of art have been executed which even of late may be taken as examples.

Therefore I believe, to conclude, that if, in any government whatever, the technical force is at first selected by a strict examination; if the promotions are made by degrees, considering the seniority in the service; and if the work, the ability, and merit of each employee is recorded, considering also special skillfulness, the result must be excellent.

This does not prevent, however, in case of a building of special and extraordinary importance (according to Article V of the law on public works, of March 20, 1865), an architect or engineer of known ability and high standing being selected by the respective ministry, or the building being given out in public competition.

Both of these systems have given very good results. The palace of the ministry of finances, finished a few years ago, the polytechnical building in Rome, now nearly completed, the new University of Naples, in course of erection, are great works of art by engineers and architects selected by the respective ministries.

But for the monument of Victor Emanuel II and for the palace of justice, both of a high monumental character, which are now in course of construction, also for the future palace of Parliament (which has been temporarily set aside), public competitions were called for.

The same method was employed by the municipality of Rome for the art gallery palace, for the national bank (the present Bank of Rome), and for its own palace—all buildings completed a few years ago.

It is true that public opinion, combined with that of prominent professionalists, is in favor of this second system, because of the fear that the first system may lead to personal favoritism.

There is no doubt that in the future, in cases where buildings or works of art of an extraordinary and exceptional importance are to be created, this system will be used, which, nevertheless, will not exclude the technical officials of the Government from showing their ability by competing with the others.

This system has two advantages: First, it takes away any doubt of favoritism; second, it gives the opportunity to some artists to show their ability who otherwise would remain unknown, not having the opportunity to come to the front, as has just been the case with the monument of Victor Emanuel.

And this system the undersigned believes should be used by all the States and by all great administrations in cases where works of a special and extraordinary importance are required to be executed.

Rome, November 16, 1897.

ALESSANDRO PROF. BETOCCHI,
Architect, Inspector of Public Labor.

Mr. G. O. TOTTEN, Jr.

150 HARLEY STREET, W. LONDON, *December 9, 1897.*

DEAR SIR: In answer to the remarks you made before the Congress at Brussels and to the notice of it you have been kind enough to send me, I beg to say that the method adopted when the Houses of Parliament were to be rebuilt was an open competition, when Sir Charles Barry, R. A., was chosen as the architect.

When the foreign and Indian offices were rebuilt an open competition was held and the work was allotted to Sir G. Gilbert Scott, R. A., and Mr. M. Digby Wyatt.

When the new law courts were to be built there was a limited competition and Mr. Edward M. Barry, R. A., was chosen, but Mr. G. E. Street, R. A., having more influence, got it for himself, and the work was done from his design.

There was also a select competition for the Imperial Institute, which was gained by Mr. Colcutt, who was the architect to the building.

For the new Admiralty buildings there was an open competition, from which the architects whose designs were most approved entered into a second select competition, and this was gained by Messrs. Leaming & Leaming, who designed the present building.

There is, however, a board of works, and Sir John Taylor, the head architect of the department, designed the new building in aid of the general post-office in St. Martins Le Grand, London, and most of the provincial post-offices. Subsequently another supplementary building for the use of the post-office was designed and carried out by Mr. H. Tanner, one of the architects under Sir John Taylor. These buildings are separate structures on the opposite sides of the street to the old general post-office.

When the competition for the completion of the Kensington Museum took place, the Royal Institute of British Architects were asked by the minister to nominate six of the best architects, and did so, and added a number of names as well, a few others being added by the minister, and the architect appointed was Mr. Aston Webb. This work, however, has not as yet been begun.

The Natural History Museum was, I believe, given to Mr. A. Waterhouse, R. A., by the minister of that day without competition.

It is, I believe, intended shortly to rebuild some of our public buildings in Whitehall, and I understand that a select number of architects will be asked to compete. In the case of select competitions a certain sum is paid to each of the competing architects to defray the cost of his time and expenditure. I may say that as a rule in all the competitions the architect whose design has been approved has been one of the foremost men in his profession, and the only case during my professional lifetime of an open competition for an important public building unearthing an unknown genius was the competition for St. George's Hall, at Liverpool; the late Mr. H. L. Elmes being before unknown to the architectural profession and to the public.

So little is known of the high and rare powers required for the creation of important monuments in our art, and of the importance of the architect being free from other cares to produce a well-considered design, that it is supposed that the noblest architectural creations can be conceived in the spare time of a man wholly occupied with the valuation of the price of land or other irrelevant occupation.

It seems that the best and fairest plan is to make a selection from those architects who have already distinguished themselves, to pay them for their work in competing, and to have the merits of the design judged of by the most eminent architect of the day. Architects of well-known ability can alone judge of the merits of architectural designs.

Your M. Leopold Eidlitz, in his book on *The Nature and Function of Art*, has well explained the value of the judgment on architectural designs of those who are not architects.

I have answered your questions rather by implication than directly, so I will say that architects having official duties to perform are not as a rule found to be so

capable of producing imposing public buildings as those constantly engaged in the designing and carrying out of pure architecture.

Yours faithfully,

GEORGE AITCHISON, A. R. A.,
Professor of Architecture at the Royal Academy of Arts.

Mr. G. O. TOTTEN, Jr.,
Architect, Legation of the United States, Brussels.

As a supplement to the above, Professor Aitchison has kindly sent me the following extract of a letter to him from Mr. Alfred Waterhouse, R. A.:

The Natural History Museums were put into my hands by Lord Mount Temple (then Mr. Cowper), the first commissioner, after the death of Captain Towke, who won his appointment in competition.

I was to carry out his work, which was only on paper, and had not been reconciled to the views of the museum authorities. That process involved an entirely new design.

So you see that there was no competition in my case, but I was set to work to carry out another man's designs or as much of it as was possible under the circumstances.

150 HARLEY STREET, W. London.

I am glad that my letter was what you wanted. * * * Except the occurrence of genius, the two most important factors in the production of good architecture are a good character for the architects and a knowledge and love of architecture by the nation, and I am inclined to think that the last is of overwhelming importance. Men of genius somehow educate themselves if the air is full of real admiration and desire for any fine art. There were no particular schools of poetry when Milton and Tennyson wrote, and Milton got pieces of waste paper for his *Paradise Lost*, so he was not tempted by money. You may recollect Swift's remark that "We can see the value the Almighty places on wealth when we see the people he has given it to."

* * * * *

G. AITCHISON.

Mr. G. O. TOTTEN, Jr.

ROYAL INSTITUTE OF BRITISH ARCHITECTS,
9 CONDUIT STREET, HANOVER SQUARE,
London, W., November 9, 1898.

DEAR SIR: This year the first minister of works sent to the Royal Institute of British Architects to get drawings and photographs of the best classical buildings that had been erected by living British * architects, to make a selection of the best designs, and to send a list of about eight names of the authors. This was done and the names of three others who got the highest number of votes after the eight were added and their drawings, etc., were afterwards sent for by the first commissioner.

These drawings were looked through by the first commissioner and the Parliamentary committee, and two architects were chosen for sending in designs for the new war office, Whitehall, and the buildings facing Great George street, and their designs are now in progress.

Yours, faithfully,

G. AITCHISON, R. A.

Mr. G. O. TOTTEN, Jr.,
Architect, Pa. ave. and 19th st., Washington, D. C.

* English, Irish, Scotch, and Welsh.

[Translation.]

PARIS, *January 27, 1898.*

DEAR SIR: In reply to your letter of December 23, I would say that for several years the Government has often instituted competitions for its buildings—in fact, very often, though it is not the rule. The construction of public buildings is not each time a subject for competition; this is not necessary in France. The reason is that we have a personnel of architects of the highest class.

You know our *École Nationale et Spéciale des Beaux Arts de Paris*, its department of architecture, its official ateliers, the outside ateliers dependent upon it, and the superior artistic, scientific, and legislative work done there.

The *École*, with its scholastic competitions, competitions for diplomas of architecture and the Grand Prix, is a recourse, an index in reality, for the Government, when in need of the services of an architect, and it does not care to institute competitions for his selection.

The Government demands of its architects the most varied services, necessitating very different attitudes—specialties, if you will. These it finds among the pupils of the *École des Beaux Arts*.

It has instituted a council and a service of diocesan buildings, religious buildings, cathedrals, bishoprics, seminaries, a council and a service of historic monuments, precious relics of former times retained and restored with care and respect, and finally a council and a service for civil buildings. These councils are consulted upon plans of projected buildings, upon the restorations, etc., and their approbation is necessary whoever the architect may be.

The different ministers have their own architect; certain ministers have even a special service, such as the minister of public instruction, for school edifices, the minister of the interior, for public needs and penitentiaries. It is for this reason that their buildings have been constructed without competition, but by their private architects, as, for instance, the palace of the minister of commerce, the post-office, the telephone office, the workshops for the post-office and telegraph, the department of war and public works on the Boulevard St. Germain. There is building at this moment the prisons of Fresnes, and M. Alfred Normand, member of the institute and the new president of the *Société Centrale des Architectes*, is at the head of the penitentiary service. At Lille, M. Batigny, of the *Société Centrale*, made the splendid school of arts and trades. I could lengthen the list of examples. On the other hand, one could name the competitors for the Grand Opera House, the Opéra Comique, the Sorbonne, the Basilica of Sacré Cœur, the Hôtel de Ville, etc.

I have in mind an interminable list of competitions; but they, for the most part, are outside of the Government. I have served during the past year as a member of the jury of two competitions.

I dare say that many competitions are instituted because the town or district has not in its service an artist in whom it has confidence, or because politics mix up in it and an architect can not be agreed upon, as there are several desirous of the work.

Competitions are good, inasmuch as they eliminate favoritism and intrigue, and the results are for the most part favorable. They permit of the introduction of new ideas or simply modern ones, and the resulting edifices are often good and well understood.

There are, nevertheless, some shadows on the picture, but they are generally traced to the authors of the programme, who are too often incompetent. These obtain only what they merit—bad programme, ignorant jury, bad competition.

The *Société Centrale des Architectes* has occupied itself with this question for a long time. It is working for reasonable ideas, justice and equality in the demands of the programme, the organization and judgment of public competition. The *Journal d'Architecture* even published a report upon the subject, a very remarkable work by M. Gaudet, read at the Congress of Architects at Bordeaux in 1895, if I remember rightly.

One searches to better understand what one can ask in a competition; there is everything to gain in a competition of ideas and not one of details.

It is not right to demand of competitors an enormous amount of work and an unnecessary expense out of all proportion with the value of the prizes.

It is well for the institutors of a competition to take proper precaution in order to permit men of standing to enter without fear of the loss of self-respect in case of defeat.

In France we try to choose our Government architects from among the élite of architects, and more and more the inferior positions are put in competition. Our "Prix de Rome" men are always given first preference. This is not favoritism, it is justice; they would not have their "Prix de Rome" if they had not personal value. Finally, the secondary and inferior places are awarded in competition to architects ranking next to these in talent. Anyone may enter these competitions even if he has not been to the École des Beaux Arts; this is very liberal.

There is still another laudable point in our system; that is, one architect and not a group of architects is given the building. Before he may begin the erection his plans must be approved by the proper council and the question of cost must be approved, and then the architect takes all the responsibility, all the glory, the honor, and compensation. These are always energetic stimulants to well-doing in all the services of an architect.

And then, too, the public and the press may praise their fine works and condemn their mediocrities. From this point of view popular education is developed more than one in general thinks.

I believe, my dear confrère, I have replied to your questions, and I pray you to accept the expressions of my most distinguished consideration.

J. M. POUPINEL,

Architecte Diplômé par le Gouvernement.

Mr. G. O. TOTTEN, Jr.,

Chief Designer, Supervising Architect's Office.

In addition to these letters, I discussed the matter with many of the members of the Congress and they were unanimously in favor of competitions for obtaining designs. Notwithstanding this, I feel that they do not fully appreciate the possibilities of this office. As far as I have been able to learn, it is the largest and best organized architectural office in existence, and I have the firm confidence and belief that it can and will produce works of real merit. Yet I think its scope is somewhat limited, for, judging from past experience, the head of this Bureau will still be subject to frequent changes, in which case the larger Government works, requiring a long time for completion, would of necessity be under several successive architects. This is unfortunate, for the successive men, each trying to improve on the work of his predecessor and perhaps not fully understanding his point of view, would produce in the end composite works which would be discreditable to our Government. Therefore I believe such works might better be under the supervision of a private or single architect, such architect to be appointed or the designs to be selected in competition.

Very respectfully,

GEORGE OAKLEY TOTTEN, Jr.

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